

Indiana House of Representatives

News and Information

*Media Office
Democratic Caucus
John Schorg, Director
Statehouse, Room 157*

*Indianapolis, Indiana 46204
1-800-382-9842 or 1-317-232-9621
Fax Number: 1-317-232-9792*

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SMITH: VOTER ID BILL DISENFRANCHISES VOTERS

INDIANAPOLIS – A voter identification bill now being debated in the Indiana House of Representatives has many legislators, including State Rep. Vernon G. Smith (D-Gary), concerned that it will keep many Hoosiers from their right to vote.

The legislation would require voters to show a photo ID on Election Day.

"I agree that we need to pass legislation that will combat voter fraud here in Indiana and on the surface, this bill seems like it will do that," said Smith. "However, the bill is really more of a poll tax for individuals who do not drive and therefore have no ID, no pressing need for an ID, and those who simply have not been able to afford an ID. A requirement of this kind makes voting an elite process when it is the constitutional right of all Hoosiers."

House Democrats are worried the bill will disenfranchise voters, specifically senior citizens, minorities and people on lower incomes.

"Senior citizens in nursing homes in particular will be negatively affected by this bill," commented Smith. "They generally do not own IDs and will be incredibly inconvenienced by having to go to their local BMV and pay for a new ID so they can vote."

Citizens who do not possess an ID will have to show proof of identity with certain documents, which he explained has the potential to make this process even more time-consuming.

"Hoosiers who need to get an ID are required to show their birth certificates, which can be difficult for many older people to track down," continued Smith. "The costs associated with getting an original copy of a birth certificate are substantial, so, in the end, you could have people paying \$30 or \$40 with the end goal of being able to vote."

Smith noted that the House Democrats have attempted to make the legislation better and more fair to all Hoosiers. Their amendments would have allowed voters to submit any one of a variety of forms of identification, including utility bills or bank statements. However, all of these recommendations have been opposed by House Republicans.

"The unfortunate aspect of this bill is that it does not address the main causes of voter fraud," said Smith. "In Indiana, most fraud occurs with absentee ballots where citizens are not present at the polls, so requiring an ID to vote will in no way fix this problem."

This legislation was recently amended into Senate Bill 483 and will be discussed in the Indiana House of Representatives later this week.